



# THE MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN

MADERA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

Volume 8 - Number 1

January, 1968

## A MADERA PIONEER FAMILY THE PRECIADOS

Quoting from a copy of The Madera County "Old Timer's" Home Coming publication, dated October 26, 1935: "The story and history of the Preciado Family, one of the oldest and well known pioneer families of California and Madera County reads like a saga of a motion picture epic of pioneer days."

Ignacio Preciado and three brothers came to California in 1848. (This family can trace their ancestry back to Madrid, Spain) As we are concerned with the family of Ignacio Preciado, we will not refer further to the brothers unless incidentally, but will confine our story to Ignacio. He was born in Hermosillo, in the state of Sonora, Mexico, July 31, 1830. In 1949, the little adobe cabin where he was born was still standing. In that year, 1830, Abraham Lincoln was studying law, the great West was still a wilderness and Clay, Webster, and Calhoun were being heard in the halls of Congress.

Ignacio and his brothers heard of the discovery of gold in California, and having heard stories all their young lives from their parents about a city called "El Dorado" where the streets were paved with gold and which the early Spanish explorers had failed to find, the boys were convinced that this was the long sought gold of the Conquistadores.

In 1849, Ignacio, aged 19, and his brothers started their long trek, on horseback, over the mountains and across desert. Though they encountered many hardships and risked attacks by marauding Apaches, they finally reached San Francisco. They received help from the Yuma Indians in crossing the Colorado River. They paid the Indians by giving them the carcasses of any of the ponies or mules that drowned while fording the river. When the Preciados reached San Francisco, there was little there but a squatters' camp of tents. They pitched their tent in what is today known as the Mission District. They remained there long enough to earn sufficient funds to go on to the gold mines of Calaveras County.

For 19 years, Ignacio lived in and around Calaveras County, mining, running a restaurant and hotel (made of tents) when he decided, as many another gold seeker did, that the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow was not there. True, he struck gold at times

but the best claims had already been staked out. Young Preciado gave up searching for gold and turned his interests toward farming and teaming, and settled in San Andreas, the county seat of Calaveras County.

It was here, in San Andreas, that Ignacio met Miss Adelaida Noreiga. Her story is equally interesting. We could devote several pages to her family. She was born at Robinson's Ferry in 1852. She was a beautiful and very popular senorita, a descendant of the famous Moraga family. She had many suitors; in fact, one of her suitors was none other than the notorious Joaquin Murrietta. The story is told that on one occasion, at a dance, the daring bandit dropped a cache of jewels in Adelaida's lap and disappeared before a posse arrived to pick up his trail. The jewels were of course handed over to the proper authorities. Shortly after this episode, in 1867, Ignacio and Adelaida were married. (Adelaida had a sister, Charlotte, who was married to Victor Gottschalk, one of Califor-





Standing: Charles, Alex, Carmelita, Albert, Lucy, Rudolph, Ignacio, Jr.  
Seated: Ben - Ignacio Sr., Adelaida, Abram. On Steps: Lita, Henry, Ida.

nia's well known superior judges.)

Mr. Preciado had several opportunities to make money in the mining fields but never quite made it. He was offered, in 1854, a partnership in the Melones Mine in Jackson, Calaveras County. He delayed a week and someone else beat him to it. This mine produced millions in gold. Preciado went to San Francisco in 1855, opened a hotel (made of canvas) on the present site of the Chronicle Building. He had a chance to buy the whole block for \$150, but at that time, the backwash of the bay waters was a handicap. The value of that block today is well over a million.

After Ignacio returned to Calaveras County, he made his home there until 1871, when he heard of the mining boom in Inyo County. He took his family to Lone Pine and continued to mine. On April 12, 1872, there was an earthquake, causing many deaths and much loss of property. Albert, their first child, was almost buried in the debris of falling adobe.

When the mining boom was over, Ignacio and his family of six children returned to San Andreas, where they remained until 1883. This family had a most trying experience when returning, because they moved in the middle of the winter. Crossing the mountains was no easy task; the roads were etched on the sides of the mountains, just barely wide enough for a team and wagon. A severe storm overtook them---a real blizzard---and for the better part of two days they were completely isolated from the rest of the world. Supplies ran low and it was bitterly cold. A family, a few miles below, came to their rescue, otherwise they would have perished.

The Preciado family were happy in San Andreas, but by this time, they began thinking of their old home in Mexico, so in 1883, they decided to return to Mexico. Ignacio, his family, now seven children, and his brothers set out on the long journey to Mexico. They traveled in a spring wagon, the three older children on horseback.

While traveling toward Mexico, they heard of the





Millinery Store in 1908  
Petra Ruiz - a customer - Carmelita - Ida

h farmlands of the San Joaquin Valley. They finally reached the then thriving little town of Borden, located about two miles south of Madera. The children all came down with the measles (Ignacio had just recovered from pneumonia before leaving San Andreas) so they remained in Borden. Mr. Preciado began working for Mr. Healy, the father of Dr. John Healy, an early doctor in Madera. Ignacio worked in the grain harvest, was paid \$1.50 per day. He became closely associated with Ned Manasse and Dr. Chester Rowell, the latter a well known citizen of Fresno. The building in which Brammer's Shoe Store and James Department Store are today was built by Ned Manasse.

The Preciados remained in Borden for some time; in fact, three of their children were born there---Ben, Abraham, and Ida. Mr. Preciado became interested in the opportunities that Madera, now a growing little town, offered, so packed up, bag and baggage and moved to Madera. They moved their house also and set it on 309 North "B" St., and this is still the old family home address. While the house was remodeled, in fact, rebuilt, some of the same lumber in their old Borden home was used and is still in the present home. Madera seemed

destined to become the permanent home of the Preciados.

Mr. Preciado was a very successful farmer, and as the boys grew up they started on their own. At one time the family operated eight ranches. The Preciados installed the first pumping plant in Madera, purchasing it from Mr. John Moore, who was county assessor for many years.

The Preciado children speak so highly of both their father and mother. They describe them as wise in judgment, loving, but with a certain inner firmness that all twelve children understood and respected.

Ignacio Preciado, Sr., passed away in 1919, at the age of 89. Mrs. Preciado passed away in 1943, at the age of 91. Thus ends the story of these two who endured so many hardships and difficulties together, but in spite of all, kept their family together, gave all the children educational opportunities, preparing them for useful lives in the town of Madera.

It is time now in this story to tell you of the twelve children that at one time were all at home at 309 "B" Street, in Madera.



Albert was the first child, born in Calaveras County in 1867. Since Albert was the oldest, (he was 16 years old when they came to Borden) he was the first to launch out in business. For many years he was an agent for the Singer Sewing Machine Co., traveled in the mountain area and out into the rural areas of Madera, and at one time, had a store in Madera, selling and repairing the machines. Albert also had an agency for the New York Life Insurance Company for many years. He married and had three children---Ernest, Ramona, and Robert.

Rudolph, the second son, was born in Lone Pine on January 6, 1869. He was a farmer for most of his life but he was also an early day merchant, in Madera, having a fruit and vegetable store in the late 80's, called "The Cash Fruit Store." This was located in the Manasse Block. Later this store became "The C.F. Preciado Co. Stationers, News Dealers and Fountain Lunch." Rudolph farmed in the Ripperdan District, raising principally grapes and peaches. He was a leader in good irrigation practices. Rudolph was married and had two sons, Rudolph, Jr., and Anselmo. He was King of the Old Timer's Celebration in 1949, Mrs. Maude Brown, a native of Millerton, was the Queen. Rudolph passed away in 1956, at the age of 87. Rudolph started the Eagles, a baseball team, that was later called the Madera Coyotes.

Ignacio, Jr., was also born in Lone Pine and experienced the earthquake mentioned earlier in the story. Then, in 1906, he experienced a second the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco. At that time Ignacio or Y.V., as many called him, had four barber shops; all were destroyed, and out of the \$20,000 insurance, he realized \$300. He returned to San Francisco in 1915 and had two barber shops in the Grand Hotel. Later he had barber shops in Madera, one next to the Hunter Drug Co. He had one in the basement of the First National Bank, now the Crocker Citizens Bank of Madera. This was a fine barber shop, and many old timers recall it. The bank building was very different in appearance from today. Later Y.V. had a barber shop in the Hotel Aragon. He was the first to rent space in that hotel. Ignacio, Jr., passed away in 1962.

While all twelve had some artistic ability, perhaps none of them had the talent for painting that Alexander, or Alex, had. Alex was also born in Lone Pine. In the old home today are several of his paint-

ings. He painted one of a little newsboy that has a special appeal to the viewer. It is framed in very old wood, colors of the picture and frame blending beautifully. His painting of his father, when he was a very old man, you might call a masterpiece. A large painting by Alex is hanging in the foyer of the Madera County Government Center. It is of the Raymond Granite Quarry in 1893, and was donated by the Preciado Family. Alex passed away in 1948.

Lucy was the first girl in the family and was a Lone Pine native, too. She married Thomas Cosgrave, a well known man of Madera and a Spanish American War veteran who won considerable fame through a poem he wrote while in the Philippines. The poem was titled, "I Want to Go Home." Mr. Cosgrave was once the editor of the Madera Mercury, for a time under-sheriff in Madera County, and also was Postmaster from 1923 - 1928. Lucy worked with her sisters in their millinery store. The couple had two children, Thomas, Jr., and Carlos. (Carlos is employed at the Post Office at this time.) Lucy passed away in 1926, her husband in 1928. Lucy was the first of the Preciado children to die.

Many in Madera well remember Carmelita as a teacher at the Preshing School. She was the children's friend, always looking out for those in need of understanding and protection. Her knowledge of English and Spanish enabled her to be of special help with the little Mexican children who could not speak or understand English. Carmelita also worked in the millinery store with sisters Ida, Lita, and Lucy. Often she was to be seen working in the stationery store, too. She was the first telephone operator in Madera. She gave many years of her life to teaching, then retired, remaining in the old home until her death in 1949. She was born in Lone Pine also.

After the family returned to San Andreas in 1880, their seventh child was born, Charles F. He was Madera County Tax Collector for several years, elected in 1902, at the age of 22. He organized and managed the Madera Coyote baseball team, which won the championship in California in the amateur league. He had extensive farming interests, also. In 1897, Charles established the Preciado Company, known as the C. F. Preciado Stationery and Fountain Lunch. This was the only store of its kind in Madera for several years and was a popular meeting place for young and old. Children came here for their school supplies, and Arbor Nook was a part of the store





Soda Fountain and Stationery Store - 1921

Mary Jones - Ida - Lita



Charles - Henry - Ben

Here young people gathered for food, dancing, and good fellowship. This store was located near the corner of North "D" and Yosemite. Ida and Lita worked at the fountain, Ben and Henry, with Charles, on the book and stationery side. Ben could be seen painting signs and chalking up scoreboard tallies.

There was seldom a celebration in Madera that was not held in front of the store. For years, Madera relied upon the billboards of Preciados for the National Baseball scores and election returns. Charles passed away in 1941.

When you think of Ben, the eighth child, you think of Henry, the youngest of the family, because they did so many things together. You associate them with community affairs, politics, visiting dignitaries, and the theater. One incident in particular that Ben and Henry will be remembered for is the promotion of the movie career of a Madera boy, "Spec" O'Donnell. They took him under their wings and succeeded in helping him to attain a special place in the movie world. "Spec" appeared in many movies as a character actor, but his greatest role was in 1925 with Mary Pickford in "Little Annie Rooney."

Ben and Henry were also instrumental in starting another Madera boy on his way to recognition, Tony Romano, who became well known as a singer and member of Al Pearce's Gang.

Ben and Henry worked with Fox Theater Organizations, and finally opened the Rex Theater, first on "C" St., and then later, on East Yosemite in the 300 block, north side. Henry said their reason for the name "Rex" was that it was the shortest word they could think of in order to save on the cost of a neon sign. They started the Ponderosa Pines Theater, Bass Lake, designing the front in a rustic manner that fitted the surroundings. Ben and Henry opened the El Rio Drive-In, in 1948. It is still operating, on weekends in the winter and every night in the summer and early fall. Henry and his son, Tommy, manage it now. There are many more things we could relate about Henry and Ben in relation to their adventures in the theaters, but space will not permit. Ben was active in the community until his death in 1965. Ben never married; he was the first Preciado child born in Borden.

Henry, the youngest of all of them, was born





Home on 309 North "B" - 1901

in Madera, and at this writing resides with his wife at 403 North "B". They have three children, Thomas, Mary, and Pat.

Of the twelve children, Abram, or Abe, was the only one that lived away from Madera for any length of time. He spent 40 years away before he came back to Madera to live again. He studied law at Stanford, but did not practice; instead he decided to follow newspaper reporting and writing. He was first connected with The Seattle News as editor, then during World War I, and only 24, he was sent to Chile by President Wilson to act as Head of the United States Bureau of Information. Later he was president and general manager of Select Features Syndicate in New York. He continued to write, publishing two books on United States Trade Relations. When he returned to Madera to live, he published a weekly newspaper called the Madera Citizen, for two years, 1950 - 51. His sister has the complete file for the two years. Abram passed away in 1951. His widow, Bonnie, lives in Fresno. She was outstanding in symphonic work for many years.

Ida was associated with her sisters in the millinery store, worked in the stationery store and soda foundation, and was cashier for Henry and Ben at the Rex Theater. She married Jack Clark. They had no children. Ida passed away in 1943; and at this writing, there are just two of the family of twelve

still living---the two youngest, Lita and Henry.

Audelita, or Lita, worked in the millinery store, the soda fountain, and ran a candy store, the latter located in the Rex Theater. It was called the Rex Milkmaid. She is the 11th child, and was born in Madera. Later she married George Whitney. Today, she lives in the big house, where at one time, the parents and twelve children lived. Lita lives alone, but has a resident companion with her most of the time. She does most of her own house work and enjoys caring for the many things throughout the house that are momentos of the family's past. There are photos, scrapbooks, china, silver, a piano, and other furniture---all a part of this one-time large family.

We have tried to give you a brief history of the Preciado family from 1830, when Ignacio, Sr., was born until this year, 1968, a period of 138 years.

The Board of Directors of the Madera County Historical Society wishes to express its appreciation to Lita and Henry Preciado for their cooperation. Credit is also given to the Madera Daily Tribune for various stories on the Preciado family, which were published in the 1930's and 1940's, and to the historical files of Judge Marcia Putney.

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## Archaeological Survey

A letter from Tom King, Chief Archaeologist, Anthropology Museum, San Francisco State College. . .

Dear Historians. . . I am writing to announce, after many delays, receipt of radiocarbon dates from our excavations in Buchanan Reservoir on the Chowchilla last summer. The dates were derived by Isotopes, Inc., a New Jersey firm, from charcoal samples taken from one of the surface housepits and from a niche in the bedrock under the cemetery. The first, from the housepit, came from a cremation in the central firepit, and was dated at  $245 \pm 100$  Before Present (BP), or 1705 A.D. The second, from the niche in bedrock, was not from an organized firepit, but was merely an isolated lump of charcoal. I was taking a chance when I sent it in that it had been culturally deposited in the bedrock, rather than dragged there by a gopher, but it was the only deep sample we had. The sample was dated  $840 \pm 370$  BP, or 1110 A.D., and I am forced to consider it to be intrusive, to have migrated downward through the site. I come to this decision because crossdating of artifact types from the cemetery, especially beads, in comparison with materials found with very good dates in the Sacramento Delta and elsewhere, places the cemetery in the 2000 to 3000 year BP range.

What this all means is that, as my analysis of the material from the Schwabacher Site, Mad-117, approaches completion, it looks as if the site was occupied for some two to three thousand years, and was probably abandoned shortly before the first Spanish expeditions into the valley. There are hints of earlier material--a few artifacts typical of earlier culture-complexes back to perhaps four to five thousand years BP, but as yet this earlier material cannot be pinned down.

The survey work that we had hoped would bring us to Madera this winter did not materialize, but the contract is now being processed for next summer's work along the Chowchilla. Apparently Dr. Wallace from Long Beach State will be working in Hidden Reservoir, so Madera should be elaborately festooned with bearded, grubby diggers. My offer of training two excavators from the Historical Society is still open, but I'd like to find out what to expect pretty soon, so I can plan for it. Mike Mannion will probably be not closely involved with whatever digging unit is organized at Madera, and hopes to test several historic sites in the Buchanan Region.



Rudolph and his store about 1889, where C.F. Preciado Stationery Store was later.

For those of you who extended to us so much kindness and interest throughout the summer, the birth yesterday morning (January 5, 1968) of Joshua Michel King may be of interest. If it had been a girl, her middle name was to have been Madera, but as it is, at 8 pounds, 14 ounces, he's a fine healthy boy (and his mother is fine--his father uncertain) and will no doubt cut his first teeth on a Valley Fever laden trowel.

Looking forward to another summer of pleasant relations with your Society, I remain,

Sincerely yours,

Tom King

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### 1968 MCHS OFFICERS

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## START PLANNING. . . . . 75th ANNIVERSARY OF MADERA COUNTY

The committee appointed by President Pyers to plan for the observance of the 75th anniversary of Madera County has grown in number. Ralph Baraldi is general chairman, and things are really moving along. Start planning now. . . and be sure to save the evening of May 18 for the big county homecoming dinner. Watch the papers for information.

## PRESENTED TO THE SOCIETY. . .

Jack Hilken of Madera presented an old square piano to the Society. It is at least 100 years old--came around the Horn to California. We'll get a complete story on it soon.

The Trinity Episcopal Church of Madera presented the first organ used in the church.

Both instruments are now in the storage room of the Society.

## APPOINTMENTS. . .

The Board of Directors appointed Mrs. Maud Lindemann as Curator of the Storage Center set up in the basement of the old Court House. A telephone will soon be installed as those who work there find a great need for it. Much research is carried on in the room---plus cataloging, filing, and storing.

There is always someone working there on Mondays, from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Also appointed by the Board to serve as Publicity Chairman for the Society---Director Lillian Robertson.

## MEMBERSHIP. . .

Every member of the Historical Society is a Committee of one to secure new members. Let's really work on it this year.

Make the 75th Anniversary a "banner year" for new members!

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Got your Bumper Stickers? What are they? A bumper sticker for your car telling that Madera County is 75 years old. They are for sale in Chowchilla, ●th Fork, Oakhurst, Coarsegold, and Madera at 50 cents each. If you don't know where to get one, write to P. O. Box 478, Madera, California.

## DUES! DUES! DUES!

Your dues are \$2.00 per member and are now payable. Mail to P. O. Box 478, Madera, California.

## MEMORIAL FUND. . .

The Madera County Historical Society has set up a Memorial Fund. It was started when contributions began coming in, in remembrance of the late Ralph Spotts, Jr. Anyone may contribute to this fund in memory of whomever you wish to remember. The fund has been placed in a separate bank account and will be used eventually for the museum which we hope to have in the not too distant future.

## TREASURER'S REPORT FOR 1967

Please note our expenses, the cost of the Historian, printing, typing, postage, etc. We hope to cut down on mailing costs as soon as President Pyers and Treasurer William Wilcox can take the necessary steps to do so.

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## THE MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN

Contributors	Lita Preciado Whitney; Henry Preciado; Several Madera Tribunes of 1937, 1956; Marcia Putney File
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THE MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN is published quarterly in January, April, July, and October by the Madera County Historical Society, P.O. Box 478, Madera, Calif. 93637. Subscription, 50¢ per ●y, \$2.00 per year, is included in membership in the Society. Please credit "The Madera County Historian" when reproducing any part.